

Citizens of Heaven (Part 2)

Philippians 3:17 – 4:1

17 April 2022

Halifax, 10:30 AM

Introduction:

Today we have a special blessing as a congregation.

- We are welcoming the Pedroso family as new members of our congregation.
- This is all the more special because they just had their first baby, a little boy named Theodore, and he is being baptised today.

Whenever we receive new members, and especially when we receive a covenant child by baptism, it draws attention to the fact that we are all citizens of heaven if we are in Christ.

- For this reason, I began a two-part sermon series last time called “Citizens of Heaven.”

In Part 1, I focused on the extraordinary privilege that it is to be a citizen of heaven.

- The people at Philippi were citizens of Rome.
 - Philippi was a colony of Rome, so it was like a piece of the city of Rome in another location. They counted this a great privilege.
 - But how much greater a privilege it is to be a citizen of heaven, though we are on earth.
- We looked at five radical differences between those who are and those who are not.
 - What you rely on for salvation is different—you rely on Christ to save you by His cross instead of relying on your own goodness.
 - Your destination is different—heaven instead of hell.
 - Your god is different—you obey God the creator instead of your own belly (your passions and desires).
 - What you glory (or boast) in is different—you glory in the Lord instead of in your shame—your own works.
 - Your focus is different—you focus on heavenly things rather than merely on earthly things. This present world becomes much less important in one way (because we have eternity before us now) and much more important in another way (because we cherish what we have here as from God and for God).
- What a wonderful and grand thing it is to be a citizen of heaven!

Today, we come to Part 2 of citizens of heaven.

- In this part, we will focus on the relationship we have with the other citizens of heaven.
 - This is one of the most important things about citizenship.
 - When you become a citizen of a place, you become an associate with all the other citizens. You have a common bond and common concern.
 - If these citizens are violent and corrupt, given over to debauchery and theft, and if the city or nation is headed for destruction, your citizenship is of little worth,
 - but if it is a city of those who are committed to glory and honour and eternal life, then it is the highest privilege of all to be a citizen of that place.

Please listen carefully now as I read the passage once again in which our text is found.

- I will begin with chapter 3, verse 1. Here is the word of God.

Philippians 3:1 – 4:1: Finally, my brethren, rejoice in the Lord. For me to write the same things to you *is* not tedious, but for you *it is* safe. ² Beware of dogs, beware of evil workers, beware of the mutilation! ³ For we are the circumcision, who worship God in the Spirit, rejoice in Christ Jesus, and have no confidence in the flesh, ⁴ though I also might have confidence in the flesh. If anyone else thinks he may have confidence in the flesh, I more so: ⁵ circumcised the eighth day, of the stock of Israel, *of* the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of the Hebrews; concerning the law, a Pharisee; ⁶ concerning zeal, persecuting the church; concerning the righteousness which is in the law, blameless. ⁷ But what things were gain to me, these I have counted loss for Christ. ⁸ Yet indeed I also count all things loss for the excellence of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them as rubbish, that I may gain Christ ⁹ and be found in Him, not having my own righteousness, which *is* from the law, but that which *is* through faith in Christ, the righteousness which is from God by faith; ¹⁰ that I may know Him and the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death, ¹¹ if, by any means, I may attain to the resurrection from the dead. ¹² Not that I have already attained, or

am already perfected; but I press on, that I may lay hold of that for which Christ Jesus has also laid hold of me. ¹³ Brethren, I do not count myself to have apprehended; but one thing *I do*, forgetting those things which are behind and reaching forward to those things which are ahead, ¹⁴ I press toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus. ¹⁵ Therefore let us, as many as are mature, have this mind; and if in anything you think otherwise, God will reveal even this to you. ¹⁶ Nevertheless, to *the degree* that we have already attained, let us walk by the same rule, let us be of the same mind. ¹⁷ Brethren, join in following my example, and note those who so walk, as you have us for a pattern. ¹⁸ For many walk, of whom I have told you often, and now tell you even weeping, *that they are* the enemies of the cross of Christ: ¹⁹ whose end *is* destruction, whose god *is* their belly, and *whose glory is* in their shame—who set their mind on earthly things. ²⁰ For our citizenship is in heaven, from which we also eagerly wait for the Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, ²¹ who will transform our lowly body that it may be conformed to His glorious body, according to the working by which He is able even to subdue all things to Himself.” ^{4:1} Therefore, my beloved and longed-for brethren, my joy and crown, so stand fast in the Lord, beloved.

May the Lord add His blessing to the reading of His holy Word.

Note especially verse 20 where it says: **“For our citizenship is in heaven.”**

- Once again, our focus will be on this verse in particular.
- We will look at three things:
 - First, at how our union with Christ is the foundation of our citizenship in heaven.
 - Then at how, as citizens, we have union with each other at multiple levels.
 - And finally, at the mutual responsibilities we have as citizens of heaven.

Let's begin.

I. Our union with Christ is the foundation of our citizenship in heaven.

A. The location of this city (the city or kingdom of heaven) is entirely unique.

1. All through the Bible, heaven is presented to us as the place where God dwells.
 - Presently, it is up there, where Jesus is.
 - When we die, our spirits (but not our bodies) go to heaven to be with Jesus before the Father, but at the last day, we are told that Jesus will raise up our bodies and gather us all here in the presence of His Father.
 2. All through the Bible, the promise to us as God's people is that we will be God's people and that He will be our God, and all through the Bible, we are told that He is preparing a city for us where we will dwell with Him forever and ever.
 - The Promised Land was a picture of that, but it was always clearly shown that it was but a shadow of the fullness that God has prepared for us.
 - Those like David who enjoyed the Promised Land in its full earthly glory recognised that there was much more to come.
 - For example, at the end of Psalm 17, he prayed that he would be delivered from wicked men who have their portion in this life, and declared,
 - **Psa 17:15: "As for me, I will see Your face in righteousness; I shall be satisfied when I awake in Your likeness."**
 - In Psalm 73, we have the words of the Psalmist to God: ²⁴ **You will guide me with Your counsel, and afterward receive me to glory.** ²⁵ **Whom have I in heaven but You? And there is none upon earth that I desire besides You.** ²⁶ **My flesh and my heart fail; but God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever.**
 - Like Abraham, we are looking for the city whose builder and maker is God.
 3. We have a taste of heaven on earth when God reveals Himself to us here, but we are not said to be in heaven until we die.
 - When Jesus was here, He revealed God to us more than God had ever been revealed on earth before, because He was the Son of God in human flesh and we behold His glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth.
 - But Jesus made it clear that He had come from heaven and was going back to His Father in heaven, and that He would eventually bring us there.
 - He told us that we could not go to the Father except through Him.
 - When Jesus was going to the cross, He prayed that we would be with Him where He was going and would see the glory that He had had with the Father from before the foundation of the world.
- B. How is it that union with Jesus is the foundation of our citizenship in heaven?
1. Jesus is the one who opened heaven to man by going there (gaining heaven) as a man.
 - Though He was God, a pure spirit, the very Son of God, from all eternity, He became human flesh two thousand years ago because of our predicament.
 - We were excluded from the enjoyment of the glory of God in heaven because of our sin and, should we appear before Him in our condition, would have been cast into the place of outer darkness by His holy glory.

- So the Son of God became a man, conceived in the womb of the virgin Mary, that He might live as man ought to live.
 - He did and the Father received Him, as a man, into glory—that is, into the fullness of the revelation of His glory—into heaven.
 - He was not cast out or cut off from heaven because He was without sin.
 - He was the first man, and the only man, to be fit to come before God.
 - It was not that God rejects us for being creatures who are so inferior to Him—not for that—but He rejects us for being sinful and corrupt.
 - Jesus became a man, just like us, but He was not corrupt so that the Father warmly welcomed Him in the form of a man.
 - With Jesus, a man was welcomed into heaven.
2. But the design of God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit in having the Son come here as man was not merely that there might be one man in heaven—it was that He might bring many sons to glory—that by Him there might be many citizens of heaven!
- Jesus came here as a mediator to reconcile us to God and bring us to heaven.
 - To do that, Jesus had to go to the cross—as a man—and pay for our sin.
 - Our sin against God, an attack on His glory and honour, had to be rectified.
 - It had to be shown clearly that what we had done was entirely unacceptable—so we could know the truth about it and so the truth might stand...the truth about the glory and honour due to God.
 - By the Son of God in human flesh being cut off and wounded for our transgressions, God demonstrated His righteousness in justifying us.
 - He set forth His righteousness and glory that cannot be compromised in the very way that He redeemed us!
 - His honour was upheld and our sin was pardoned at the same time by the suffering of Christ.
3. Now the good news is to be declared to the world that whoever believes in Jesus who was crucified for our sins will be saved—fully pardoned and brought to heaven to dwell with God forever!
- John 3:16 says it plainly: whoever believes in Him, will not perish, but have everlasting life.
 - In John 14:6, Jesus said, “I am the way, the truth, and the life, no one comes to the Father but by me.”
 - Heaven is completely inaccessible to us unless we believe in Jesus.
 - If you trust in Him as crucified to save sinners, you will be saved and He will bring you to the Father in glory forever and ever.
 - You will be with King Jesus in glory forever.
 - Yes! As soon as you believe, you become a citizen of heaven so that on the day that you die, your spirit will go to be with Jesus in heaven, and at the last day, your body will be raised as immortal. Then heaven

will come down to earth so that we will be in heaven with Jesus our King (with God fully revealed) forever in both body and spirit.

- We are already citizens of heaven, but then we will be in heaven.

TRANS> Union with Christ (by faith) is the foundation of our citizenship in heaven.

- Now let's consider our second point.

II. All of us who are united to Christ have union with each other as citizens of heaven.

- Let it be clear.
- Every single person who is united with Christ by faith is united with every other believer as a citizen of heaven.
- We have three different levels of association that we have as citizens of heaven on earth—similar to the way that you may be a citizen of Canada, but also a citizen of Nova Scotia, and a citizen of Halifax.

A. First, we are citizens of the holy catholic and apostolic church—the entire church.

1. The word catholic means universal.

- It is not tied to any particular denomination, but is made up of all Christians.
- The Roman Catholic church is not actually catholic at all—it is but a branch of the catholic church.
 - If it were catholic, as it claims, it would mean that it is the only place where true citizens of heaven are found—the pretentious claim that was made at the Council of Trent at the time of the reformation.
- It is but one sect within the catholic or universal church, and a sectarian sect at that in that it cast out faithful ministers of Christ who sought to reform it.
 - It followed the pattern of the church in the Old Testament that cast out the prophets, claiming that the faithful prophets were not part of the church.
 - This was, in fact, what the leaders in the seats of power did when Jesus came—they excommunicated the Son of God so that Jesus suffered with His disciples “outside the camp.”
 - This did not make the many who were not excommunicated outside the true church—many had not yet learned of Jesus but were regenerate people who welcomed the gospel of Christ when it was preached to them.
 - Thus it was at the reformation. There were many true sons that remained in the Roman Church because they were never cast out.

2. So we need to recognise that the citizens of heaven are not those who are in a particular denomination. They are those who profess to be united to Christ by faith in Him as crucified and who follow Him.

- We cannot tell if any individual is sincere in his profession, but we can and should judge whether his profession is credible.

- For example, if he professes to believe that he is saved by his own words, we are not to regard him as a citizen of heaven because the citizens of heaven profess that salvation is only through Christ crucified.
 - And likewise, if he professes to believe what is true, but lives in open rebellion against the Lord and refuses to repent, we cannot regard him as a citizen of heaven.
 - Because we love people, we should warn those who, though they may be members of a church, do not have a credible profession.
 - We need to call them to repent and believe on the Lord Jesus Christ.
 - Remember that the ones the prophets addressed the most about their unbelief were not those who were outside the church, but those who were inside without a credible profession of faith—either because of denying the gospel or because of a rebellious walk.
3. Understand that when we receive or remove members from our congregation, we are receiving or removing them from the holy catholic church.
- In other words, we are speaking for the church and declaring them to be citizens of heaven or not.
 - This is the duty that Christ gave to the elders of every local church.
 - In Matthew 18:18, He said, **Assuredly, I say to you, whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven.**
 - The elders may act in error (as they did when they rejected Jesus and the prophets and reformers), but they are speaking for heaven who will overrule them in the end—but it is their duty to speak for Christ on earth in this matter by acting according to His word.
 - The Session of our congregation met with the Pedrosos and we concurred with the elders of the congregation that they are coming from that they have a credible profession of faith and obedience.
 - It was our duty to receive them as citizens of heaven, and it is our duty to see that they maintain their profession as long as they are with us.
 - This is a huge responsibility.
 - When we receive members, we do not merely receive them (or recognise them) as members of our particular church, but Christ has appointed us to receive them as citizens of heaven.
 - When we baptise Theodore today, we are not just baptising him into this congregation, but into the holy catholic and apostolic church.
 - It is a momentous event.
4. How we ought to delight in all those in every place who call on the name of the Lord, whatever particular denomination they may be of.
- They are fellow citizens with us and we have fellowship with them and rejoice in them.

- But this brings us to consider the next level of our communion with one another as fellow citizens of heaven.
- B. As citizens of heaven, we belong to various denominations or sects.
1. Whenever you have a large society, it gets broken down into smaller units.
 - As I already mentioned, you have government at different levels so that a citizen of Halifax is also a citizen of Nova Scotia and a citizen of Nova Scotia is also a citizen of Canada.
 - Is this a good thing, or a bad thing?
 - It is good because it makes for good government—you are known on the local level.
 - It is bad, however, when the reason for the division is factious.
 2. Denominations and sects are a reality among the citizens of heaven and always have been.
 - In the time of the prophets, you had the Southern and Northern kingdoms (Judah and Israel) that had separate altars, yet both were addressed as God's people.
 - Likewise, in the time of Jesus, you had the Pharisees, the Zealots, the Herodians, the Sadducees, the Essenes, the Samaritans, and many others.
 - You are always going to have those in the church who band together for different reasons or in opposition to various things and who meet in separate congregations.
 - In the NT church, such sects arose even while the apostles were still alive.
 - For example, there was the circumcision party, some of which, though wrong, were true brothers in the faith. They formed separate assemblies.
 - Those who were in congregations that were part of the circumcision party were right to withdraw from them.
 - There were other divisions, like the ones at Corinth among those who followed a particular minister in a divisive way, that should be opposed.
 - With the circumcision party, it was the error that was to be opposed, but at Corinth, it was the division itself that was to be opposed.
 - We are right to leave a denomination that denies the deity of Christ, but wrong to leave one that has ministers we don't like.
 3. What do we take away from this?
 - a. First, we learn from this that it is the duty of ministers and elders to establish confessions and practices that are in accord with scripture.
 - Confessions are called for when there is error to clarify what the Biblical teaching is, for example, when the deity of Christ is denied, or when the doctrine of election is rejected or when the Lord's Day is not observed.
 - b. Second, as members, we learn that we ought to be careful to align ourselves with those denominations that have biblical confessions.
 - In the NT time, those who were going to churches that were part of the circumcision party were called to come out as a general rule, however,

some of them would have been less extreme and might warrant staying in for a while.

- In our day, we recognise that churches whose confessions are weak or in error often have believers in them, but some have members that need to be evangelised because the gospel is so twisted.
 - It is our duty to align ourselves in a sound church without going to an extreme position that causes us to hop from church to church or to remove ourselves from the church altogether because none are good enough for us.

C. The smallest division within the church is the local church.

- Every Christian is instructed to be a member of a particular congregation. This is, in fact, the level at which persons are received into the catholic church.
- How is this shown?
 1. First, we see the clear teaching of the New Testament that elders were to be established in every city as overseers (or bishops).
 - There was to be a plural number in every congregation.
 - For example, Paul writes to Titus that this was something that still needed to be done at Crete to complete the establishment of churches there:
 - **Tit 1:5: For this reason I left you in Crete, that you should set in order the things that are lacking, and appoint elders in every city as I commanded you—**
 2. Second, we see that these elders were authorised to receive and remove members from the church of Jesus Christ, not according to their own standards, but according to the directives of God's word.
 - This was established in the Old Testament. In Matthew 18 and other places, Jesus shows that it is to continue in the New Testament.
 - As we already saw, He says to the church (in this case, the assembly of elders), in Matt 18:18-19: **“Assuredly, I say to you, whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven. 19 Again I say to you that if two of you agree on earth concerning anything that they ask, it will be done for them by My Father in heaven.”**
 - We recently looked at 1 Cor 5 where Paul rebuked the elders at Corinth for not removing a man that needed to be removed because of his sin.
 - He concluded the chapter with the command to (1 Cor 5:13): **“put away from yourselves the evil person.”**
 - At the same time, of course, the elders are to receive all those who profess faith in Jesus and obedience to Him as members by baptising them.
 - God has authorised that those born to His people are also to be baptised at their birth.
 - And when they come to years and ability to understand, they are also to confess their faith, for all are to confess with their mouth and believe in

their heart that Jesus is Lord and Saviour when they are capable of doing so.

- Then they also are received to the Lord's Table, no longer with a passive profession, but now with an active profession of faith.
3. Third, we see that Christians are commanded to submit (in the Lord) to the elders of their local church as the representatives of Jesus Christ.
- Hebrews 13 has several references to those who rule over you:
 - **Heb 13:7: Remember those who rule over you, who have spoken the word of God to you, whose faith follow, considering the outcome of their conduct.**
 - **Heb 13:17: Obey those who rule over you, and be submissive, for they watch out for your souls, as those who must give account. Let them do so with joy and not with grief, for that would be unprofitable for you.**
 - **Heb 13:24: Greet all those who rule over you, and all the saints. Those from Italy greet you.**

TRANS> So you see that as citizens of heaven, we are citizens at the universal level, but also at the denominational and local level.

- Now I want to turn to our third point.

III. That as citizens of heaven, we have responsibilities.

- We have seen that we have marvellous privileges, and where there is great privilege, there is great responsibility.
 - Just think of all we have in Christ as citizens of heaven! Complete forgiveness, justification, the blessing of the Holy Spirit, transformed hearts, new life, adoption, gifts of ministry, access to God in prayer, revelation of God, fellowship with each other, God's ordinances, the hope of the resurrection, an inheritance in heaven.

A. We need to be allegiant to King Jesus!

1. As citizens, we honour Him by resting in His saving work.
 - We are citizens only because of Him and His saving mercy to us.
 - We are to constantly resort to Him for forgiveness, for help in temptation, for grace to obey, for guidance, for help in ministry to others, for His gracious work in the church and in her preservation, for deliverance from our enemies.
 - We are to be a people of faith who live as those who know that without Him we can do nothing.
2. As citizens, we are to be worshippers of our God.
 - Christ has reconciled us to Him, and an essential aspect of a person's right relationship with God is worship.
 - We have so much reason to praise Him, for Jesus, in saving us, has revealed to us the glory of God's justice that had to be satisfied, His power that delivered us from so great a bondage to sin, His wisdom that developed a way of salvation for us, His grace and mercy that provided it despite our unworthiness, His holiness that cannot be compromised, His love that fully accepts us...

- Let us come to Him with songs of praise and thanksgiving, prayers of the same, along with our supplications, the ordinances of baptism and the Lord's Supper that He appointed for us—all with faithful regular worship both in our homes, our closets, and our local assemblies.
3. And then of course we are to obey Him—for we are citizens of a great and benevolent king and the nation He establishes is a holy nation.
 - As citizens of heaven, we are to be distinctively different, not given to drunkenness or sexual immorality.
 - We are to put off the old man with his ways and his attitudes, with his sinful passions and desires, and to put on the new man that is renewed day by day as we submit to all His commandments, statutes and ordinances.
 - We are to learn the beautiful ways of His household, His kingdom, His nation. We learn to walk in His ways beautifully and cheerfully, not with a complaining spirit or a frowning countenance.
- B. We also need to be devoted to our fellow citizens as fellow members in Christ.
1. He has brought us together to be citizens of His glorious kingdom, and we show our love to Him by loving and serving each other.
 - In fact, are told that if we do not love our brothers and sisters, we cannot claim that we love Him.
 - We are also told that this love is not to be merely warm sentiments, but an active pouring out of ourselves in service to one another.
 - We are fellow citizens and joint heirs of the same glorious kingdom and we are not meant to be isolated, but together!
 2. One of the first things we are called to do is to find each other.
 - Our Lord has many people that He has chosen for salvation, and He has commanded us to do our part in bringing the gospel to every one in every nation that we may reach them.
 - We are to pray, we are to give to missions (one of our elders mentioned recently that if everyone in the congregation tithed, he believed we'd have enough to bring on a second minister to reach the lost in Glenholme), we are live as an example, we are to testify of what our Lord has done for us, of the hope that we have in Him, and we are to urge others to come to Him, to invite them to church, to reach out to them with the gospel, telling of God's free offer to save all who will trust in Christ.
 - What we have in Christ is too good to keep to ourselves.
 3. And then we have our duty to those who are already in the church. We are to love them, to serve them, and to refresh them.
 - Just think—they are the citizens of heaven, redeemed by our dear Lord.
 - As those who love Him, we have every reason to love them and serve them.
 - We should never isolate ourselves from them.

- a. We should speak to each other of His goodness, of His faithfulness, beauty, grace, holiness, wisdom, sovereignty, and love—
 - refreshing them in their love for their king and their delight in Him.
 - We so quickly forget who we are as citizens of heaven in Him.
- b. We should speak to them of our hope in Him, of His help in our walk in our struggles that we may help them keep their eyes on the things above.
 - We should remind them of His promises and of how sure they are.
 - Of the resurrection and the promise of immortality.
 - Of His mighty works through the ages and how when it looked like everything in His kingdom was ruined, He has again and again shown forth His mighty arm to deliver His people.
 - We are citizens of heaven! Our king is reigning at God's right hand and all things are orchestrated for His glory and our blessing as His people.
- c. And finally, as citizens of heaven, we are to minister to each other's needs—rebuking those who sin and calling them to repentance, restoring those who are entrapped in sin, comforting those who sorrow, encouraging those who have lost hope, helping those who are weak or busy, providing material things or practical services for those who are in need, teaching, correcting, showing compassion...
 - We are to live as citizens of heaven.
 - The Philippians lived as citizens of Rome, we are to live as citizens of heaven whose glorious, gracious king is reigning at God's right hand in glory.
 - Yes, we often come short, and in shame we must freely confess our sins and seek forgiveness, but let us never lose sight of the fact that the kingdom of which we are citizens is beautifully glorious because of our King who is altogether lovely and pleasing to God, and who is committed and capable of completing the work that He has begun in us.
 - Let us live together as citizens of His glorious city.